DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 322 112 SP 032 471

AUTHOR Handler, Marianne G.
TITLE A Computer Coordinator's Network: Filling a Collegial Void.
PUB DATE 11 May 90
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Technology and Teacher Education Conference (Greenville, NC, May 11, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Computer Science; Elementary Education; *Resource Teachers; *Shared Resources and Services; *Social Networks; Social Support Groups; *Staff Development

ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of computers in schools has brought about the equally rapid growth of persons to coordinate computer education programs and work with teachers and students. For these persons there is often a "collegial void," a lack of others with whom to share ideas and concerns. The purpose of this paper is to describe the development and evaluation of a computer coordinators' network, designed to provide support for teachers who have responsibility for computer education in elementary schools of their district. This collaborative environment allowed for persons with similar responsibilities to discuss and reflect upon common concerns and problems. The value of networking as a form of staff development is demonstrated. Recommendations related to planning, organization, structure, and on-going activities of the group are discussed in the paper. (Author)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED322112

A Computer Coordinator's Network: Filling a Collegial Void

Marianne G. Handler, Ed.D.

National College of Education
(becoming National-Louis University in June, 1990)
Evanston, Illinois

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M. G. Handler

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Paper presented at the Technology and Teacher Education Conference, Greenville, North Carolina, May 11, 1990

©Marianne Handler, 1990

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

SP 032 471

Abstract

The rapid growth of computers in schools has brought about the equally rapid growth of persons to coordinate computer education programs and work with teachers and students. For these persons there is often a "collegial void," a lack of others with whom to share ideas and concerns. The purpose of this paper is to describe the the development and evaluation of a computer coordinators' network, designed to provide support for teachers who have responsibility for computer education in their elementary school of district. This collaborative environment allowed for persons with similar responsibilities to discuss and reflect upon common concerns and problems. The value of networking as a form of staff development is demonstrated. Recommendations related to planning, organization, structure and on-going activities of the group are discussed in the paper.

While this presentation is primarily concerned with the process of developing and evaluating a computer coordinators' network it will also look at other network groups and the use of networks as a form of staff development. We will identify the unique staff development needs of computer coordinators, and, using the purposes and operational features of this particular network, draw implications for staff development practices based on the feedback from those who participated in the network.

The rapid growth of computers in schools has brought about the equally rapid growth of persons to coordinate computer education programs and work with students and teachers. These coordinators frequently come from the teaching ranks and must acquire the needed skills of this new technology while on the job. Little consideration has been given to the opportunities for professional growth and development needed by this group as they strive to develop excellence in a field new to them, and to the profession.

The problem

Computer coordinators occupy unique positions in their buildings. In small districts there often is a "collegial void," a lack of others with whom to share concerns and ideas. Many computer coordinators are expected to provide staff development within the work setting but have limited opportunities for their own professional growth outside of attending workshops and conferences. These conferences are generally annual events and leave little opportunity to reflect upon what has been learned or to share and develop mew ideas with colleagues.

Although educators serving as computer coordinators are relatively knowledgeable about computers in comparison to classroom teachers, they may in fact, have had only minimal experience with computers. Many coordinators are self-taught, with gaps in their knowledge of computers and computer education. They are given responsibility for administering and developing a program, often with no administrative or curriculum background, and more often, with no administrative authority. In many

cases, they are given responsibility for providing staff development for others although, they themselves, have had little, if any, work in the area of staff development.

Indeed, many are only part-time computer coordinators with classroom teaching assignments in addition to their computer education responsibilities. The computer portion of the job requires keeping up with new developments, organizing materials and hardware in the setting and planning activities for both students and teachers. It is especially difficult for part-time teachers to find the time needed to meet the responsibilities of the new job and do the job well.

The network described in this presentation was designed to support the teachers who have responsibility for computer education in their elementary school or within their district at the elementary school level. Other groups have found the same need for collegial support. Principals have developed grass roots groups and more formal Principals' Centers. A principals group, developed at the grass roots level, will be included as a way of describing differences between kinds of networks.

Review of the literature

There is a great deal of difference between the duties of a classroom teacher and the duties of a computer coordinator (Moursund, 1985). Although coordinators are given administrative duties, they still have "one foot planted firmly in the classroom" (McGinty, 1987, p. 19). According to Moursund (1985) the computer coordinator's responsibilities frequently include working longer hours, working in administrative-level activities, planning teacher inservice programs, planning curriculum, as well as classroom teaching and running a computer lab. Full-time coordinators find a 40-hour week insufficient for the tasks of their job, and the part-time coordinator may have all of the same responsibilities plus teaching both children and staff (McGinty, 1987).

Research has supported the importance of providing training for those responsible for staff development (Washington state system for coordination of staff development, 1981). Wu (1987) found that teachers prefer working with other teachers, but pointed out the need for training teacher that undertake this role. Using his years of study and experience in computer education Moursund developed an in-service program for computer coordinators at the building and district level "to improve their computer education leadership performance (Moursund, Session 8, 1986). Two of the key elements within that session centered on developing peer support groups and continuing support from resource people (Moursund, 1986).

Opportunities for collegial interaction are often missing for many teachers; they are even less available to the computer coordinator/teacher. Many educational researchers have spoken to the problem of teacher isolation (Goodlad, 1984; Rothberg, 1985; Little, 1981). Teacher centers and principal centers were developed in response to the needs of teacher to operate in collegial and collaborative environments that could attenuate that sense of isolation. Centers can provide the time, support, warmth, concreteness and stimulus for thought that are often a by-product of meetings (Thomas, 1982). In developing the Teacher Center Model at Carnegie-Mellon, McCarthy and Popchock (1980) included topical workshops, colleague support groups, and teacher networks as key elements to be included. Similarly, in a principal center participants are encouraged to identify areas in which need help and support and then act as resources for each other (Unikel, 1985).

According to Bents and Howey (1981) a staff development program should meet the needs of participants to find ways to improve their skills in working with teachers and students. It should recognize that change is process, not an event, and that time is needed for all of the elements of the process to take place (Fullan, 1982). Effective staff development programs should include self-direction, encourage mutual enquiry and

allow for a variety of different learning styles on the parts of the participants (Wood, Thompson, & Russel, 1981).

A network group can be an effective staff development model because it provides an opportunity for each of these elements. Networking is a process that utilizes the exchange of information, resources and services to solve problems and, in this way, facilitate self-directed learning (Welliver, 1981). Professionals with common interests who have a need to link with others in similar positions find the social system provided within a network to be valuable (Freeman, 1982). Networking provides a pooling of skills and abilities for sharing and solving of problems that could not be achieved by individuals alone (Welliver, 1981)

Project Purpose

The purpose of the project was to provide a cooperative environment, and the appropriate leadership, in which persons with responsibility for computer education can meet and develop a support network. A network group is a collaborative environment, where persons with similar responsibilities can discuss and reflect upon common concerns and problems. The agenda for the group was determined by the changing needs of the members.

The plan was to provide an opportunity to exchange ideas on a regular basis, to share resources related to professional growth for the development of new teaching strategies, and to stimulate new ideas by visiting member's school sites.

Formation and composition of the network

Teachers in the north suburban Chicago area who had at least half-time computer education responsibilities at the kindergarten through eighth grade level were invited to participate in the computer coordinator's network. The group met monthly from October through May on a weekday afternoon after the school day. Attendance at the meetings was voluntary and averaged about twelve members at each meeting. Over the course of the year forty-one coordinators attended.

Members of the group represented twenty-eight area schools including elementary, middle school or junior high buildings, as well as kindergarten through eighth grade buildings. Seven members of the group had additional classroom teaching responsibilities. Ten other were Learning Center Directors, thus having media programs to supervise as well.

The computer coordinator's job descriptions varied widely from school to school. All taught computer topics to students and served as a resource to teachers who used computers in their buildings. In addition, some were responsible for ordering hardware and software and for coordinating the maintenance of equipment. There was also a range of titles for these coordinators but the concerns and problems they discussed were very much the same.

The topic of each meeting was determined by the group at the previous meeting. Two meetings were hosted by members of the group at their schools so that special equipment, such as computer networks, could be demonstrated.

Network Activities

The facilitator compiled a list of the members, with phone numbers, and distributed it to all participants to encourage interaction outside of meetings. A computer was available at each meeting in order for participants to add information to a database of software and materials members had found to be of value. Members were also encouraged to bring public domain software to share at each meeting.

A monthly newsletter contained a summary of the previous meeting, a description of plans for the next meeting and notices of future meetings or conferences. Participants were also encouraged to submit materials for inclusion in the newsletter. Articles from other newsletters were included, as were software reviews written by members, cartoons submitted by participants and tidbits gleaned from a variety of sources.

Evaluation procedures and findings

Participants at the first meeting completed a questionnaire designed to gather descriptive data on the computer coordinator's and their schools and to assess their needs and interests. At mid-year a short survey was mails to participants and a final questionnaire was sent out following the last meeting. These instruments were used to assess the strength and weaknesses of the network and to determine the extent to which it met the coordinators' needs. A Likert Scale was used when determining if the earlier identified needs had been met.

Findings resulting from these evaluation procedures fell into two major areas; a) organizational issues and b) questionnaire issues.

Organizational issues. Organizational issues included problems of common meeting times, the wide range of skill levels that existed within the group and the differing interests of elementary school coordinators and middle school/junior high school coordinators.

One of the strengths of the group was the informal nature of the meetings, but that was also one of the weaknesses. New members who joined in later months were often frustrated and disappointed to find that topics of interest to them had been covered at a previous meeting. Elementary school and junior high teachers each indicated that they would find it useful to meet as a sub-group as well.

While many members, through the first questionnaire, had indicated interest in a newsletter, no member volunteered to help with the production of the paper. The facilitator accepted the responsibility with occasional contributions from members. In the final questionnaire participants identified the news letter as one of the most valuable parts of the network group activities.

Some of the coordinators expressed interest in working with others to develop teaching materials for particular pieces of software, to evaluate software, or to share

information on current research in computer education. In fact, little of this took place. The demands on teacher time had its impact on this group.

Questionnaire issues. Members were asked to identify what they perceived as the strengths and weaknesses of the group. The strength of the group most often mentioned was the opportunity to share and discuss with others. Questionnaire results also indicated that participants saw the expectations of the group as having been met throughout the year.

To improve the network, participants recommended finding more convenient meeting times and to expand the group to include more coordinators. With one exception, all respondents, wished the group to continue the following year, indicating a clear need for this kind of interaction.

Conclusions

One year did not seem to be long enough for the participants to become a cohesive group. This may be due, in part, to the facilitator's continued leadership, thus obviating any long-term commitment from the group.

This project assumed a shared need among computer coordinators, often lacking job-alike colleagues in their buildings or districts, to come together to discuss common problems, concerns successes. The early noted questionnaire results support the assumption that a network group can fill the "collegial void" for computer coordinators and provide valuable staff development.

In planning future groups of this nature consideration should be given to the structure of the group. Elementary teachers and junior high/middle school teachers may prefer to have separate meeting based on unique interests and problems at each level. It is possible that formation of Special Interest Groups (SIGS) may solve that problem.

It is also recommended that: a) facilitators consider finding key people in several schools to help in establishing the network, b) issues of school level divisions and

coordinator proficiency be considered as groups are developed and c) more involvement from the group be encouraged as it develops so as to increase the feeling of group "ownership" of the network. When computer coordinators join together to share successes and problems, they not only expand their own expertise but also do a better job in teaching their students and helping other teachers in their districts to use computers more effectively.

Addendum:

During the second year the network continued under the leadership of one of the regular members. These meetings were also held at the office of the Educational Service Center. The group decided to meet bimonthly, new members joined the group as there were no longer the limits imposed by the original project. No member of the group was willing to undertake the newsletter and that communication tool was discontinued. The facilitator continued as a member of the group. At the end of that second year the group decided to publicize a final meeting in which a decision would be made about becoming a chapter of the state computer educators group. The group voted to make this commitment thus opening the group to all computer using educators in the area.

During the third year the group developed a constitution, elected officers, participated in the state conference, and held regular chapter meetings. The computer coordinators still have a need for support and have found it through this network, despite the growth in the size of the group. There is a LOGO special interest group and the formation of a computer coordinators special interest group is not out of the question.

Selected References

Bents, R. H., & Howey, K. R. (1981). Staff development - Change in the individual. In B. Dillion-Peterson (Ed.), Staff development/organization (pp. 11-36). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Bull, G., Harris, J., Lloyd, J., & Short, J. (1989). The electronic academical village. Journal of Teacher Education, 40,(4), 27-31.

Coleman, P. (1984). Elementary school self-improvement through social climate enhancement (Report No. ERIBC-84:8). Burnaby, British Columbia: Simon Fraser University, Faculty of Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 251 961).

Daresch, John C. (1986, October). Principals' perceptions of the quality of alternative administrative inservice models. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 279 102)

Dyer, W. G. (1984). Strategies for managing change. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Freeman, E. B., & Peterson, L. T. (Eds.) . (1982). Networking: A case study and developmental model. Washington, D.C.: Department of Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 265 876)

Fullan, M. (1982). The meaning of educational change. New York: Teachers College Press.

Goodlad, John I. (1984). A place called school: Prospects for the future. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

King, R. A. (1987, April). Computer equity and the role of the district level computer coordinators. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, D.C..

Levine, S. L. (1986). The principals' center movement: When school leaders became learners. The Journal of Staff Development, 7,(2), 28-41.

Levine, S. L. (1985). Translating adult development research into staff development practices. The Journal of Staff Development, 6(1), 6-17.

Little, J. D. (1981). School success and staff development: The role of staff development in urban desegregated schools. Executive summary. (Contract No. 400-79-0049). Boulder, CO: Center for Action Research, Inc.

McCarthy, B., & Popchock, C. (1980). Involving teachers in continuing professional development: A teacher center model. Pittsburgh: PA:Carnegie-Mellon University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 219 359).

McGinty, T. (1987, February). Growing pains: A portrait of an emerging profession. Electronic Learning, pp. 18-23, 48.

Moursund, D. (1985). The Computer Coordinator. Eugene, OR: International Council for Computers in Education.

Moursund, D. (1986). High Tech/ High Touch: A computer education leadership development workshop. Eugene, OR: International Council for Computers in Education.

Reed, H. B. (1981). Concepts for a staff development design on networking. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 204 345)

Rothberg, R. A. (1985, November). Improving school climate and reducing teacher isolation. Paper presented at the Annual meeting of the National Council of States on Inservice Education, Denver, CO.

Thomas, G. (1982). Workparties: A vehicle for prompting reflection and networking. Journal of Staff Development, 3(2), 130-141.

Unikel, B. W. (1985). An analysis of principals' center in the United States: Their organization and operation. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Loyola University of Chicago, Chicago.

Walker, Paul R. (1981). The Washington State Teacher corps/Teacher Center Network. Bellingham, WA: Western Washington University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 205 506)

Welliver, C. (1981). Manual for a model for networking. Adult Education Association of Michigan, Lansing: Michigan Library Association, Lansing. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 213 418)

Wood, F. H., Thompson, S. R., & Russel, Sister F. (1981). Designing effective staff development programs. In B. Dillon-Peterson (Ed.), Staff development/organization (pp. 59091). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Wu, P.C. (1987). Teachers as staff developers: Research, opinions and cautions. Journal of Staff Development, 8(1), 4-6.